

Augustine of Hippo

Encyclical Letter of HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI

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TO OUR VENERABLE BRETHREN, THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE, ON SAINT AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, AT THE CLOSE OF THE FIFTEEN HUNDREDTH YEAR FROM HIS DEATH

POPE PIUS XI

VENERABLE BRETHREN: HEALTH AND APOSTOLIC BLESSING.

IT is eminently befitting the nature and necessity of the case, that Christ Jesus has been and shall continue to be ready to safeguard the Church, which His provident care established for the salvation of the human race. This certainty is warranted by the promise of her Divine Founder, which we read in the Gospel; and it must be clear to evidence from the annals of that Church, on which error has never set a stain, which no falling away—however widespread—of her sons has made to waver, which regains her youthful vigor and ceaselessly renews her strength despite the assaults of impious men, even when carried to the most shocking extremes. While our Lord in securing the stability and promoting the growth of His foundation, which belongs to all time, did not limit Himself to a single method nor proceed always in the selfsame way, yet it is noteworthy that in every age He raised up distinguished men, who, by talents and efforts suited to the times and their exigencies, should rejoice the heart of the Christian people, by successively curbing and conquering the "power of darkness." This choice of Divine Providence, when it fell upon Augustine of Tagaste, was marked by a discrimination that was more than ordinarily striking. He was the light set upon

the candlestick, he was the vanquisher of every heresy and a guide to eternal salvation for his contemporaries. What is more, he continued to teach and console Christians as age succeeded age. Nay, even in our time we owe it to him in large measure that among believers the truth of Faith maintains its luster, while love for God has not ceased to burn. Indeed, it is a matter of common knowledge that the writings of Augustine, by their exceptional sublimity and charm, cast a spell over many who are at variance with us or who seem utter strangers to the Faith. Hence it is, that since the current year brings in its course with happy auspices the fifteenth centennial anniversary of the death of this peerless Bishop and Doctor, Christians the world over are eager to hold his memory in honor and are preparing to give public proof of their admiration and devotion. Yielding, therefore, to a sense of Our Apostolic office and to the delight that stirs Our soul, while desirous of adding to the chorus of praise, We urge you all, Venerable Brethren, and the clergy and flock of each of you, to join Us in offering special thanks to the Heavenly Father for enriching His Church by means of Augustine with so many matchless blessings—the Saint who profited so much by the Divine gifts lavished on him and turned the current of this wealth upon the Catholics of the world. It beseems us all today not merely to exult that by a miracle, so to speak, was once united to the Mystical Body of Christ a genius so great and lofty, that in the judgment of history his superior can hardly be found anywhere in any age, but rather to steep and nourish ourselves with his learning and copy the model of his holy life.

The praise of Augustine has never ceased to be proclaimed in the Church of God, even by the Roman Pontiffs. While the holy Bishop was yet alive, Innocent I greeted him as a beloved friend¹ and extolled the letter which he had received from the Saint and from four Bishops, his friends: "a letter instinct with faith, and staunch with all the vigor of the Catholic religion."² Shortly after the death of Augustine, Celestine I defends him against his opponents in the following noble words:

¹Innocent to the Bishops Aurelius and Augustine: *epist.* 184 among the Augustinian letters.

²Innocent to Aurelius, Alypius, Augustine, Evodius, and Possidius, Bishops: *epist.* 183, n. 1, among the Augustinian letters.

We have ever deemed Augustine a man to be remembered for his sanctity, because of his life and services in our communion, nor has rumor at any time darkened his name with the suspicion of evil. So great was his knowledge, as we recall, that he was always reckoned by my predecessors also among our foremost teachers. All alike, therefore, thought highly of him as a man held in affection and honor by all.³

Gelasius I hailed Jerome and Augustine as "luminaries among ecclesiastical teachers."⁴ Hormisdas wrote in answer to Bishop Possessor's request for direction these weighty words: "What the Roman, that is, the Catholic Church follows and maintains touching free will and the grace of God, can be learned from the different works of blessed Augustine, those especially which he addressed to Hilary and Prosper, though the formal chapters are contained in the ecclesiastical records."⁵ A like testimony was uttered by John II, when in refutation of heretics he appealed to the works of Augustine: "Whose teaching," he said, "according to the enactments of my predecessors, the Roman Church follows and maintains."⁶

Can anyone be unaware how thoroughly familiar with the doctrine of Augustine were the Roman Pontiffs, during the ages that followed close upon his death, as Leo the Great, for example, and Gregory the Great? Thus Saint Gregory, thinking as highly of Augustine as he thought humbly of himself, wrote to Innocentius, prefect of Africa: "If you wish to feast on choice food, read the works of blessed Augustine, your fellow-countryman. His writings are as fine wheat. Seek not for our bran."⁷ It is well known that Adrian I was in the habit of quoting passages from Augustine, whom he styled "an eminent doctor."⁸ Again, Clement VIII, to throw light on the obscure features of abstruse debates, and Pius VI, in his Apostolic Constitution "Auctorem fidei," to unmask the evasions of the condemned Synod of Pistoia, availed themselves of the support of Augustine's authority.

³Celestine to Venerius, Marinus, Leontius, Auxonius, Arcadius, Filtianus, and the rest of the Bishops of Gaul: *epist.* 21, c. 2, n. 3.

⁴Gelasius to all the Bishops of Picenum (*circa finem*).

⁵Hormisdas, *epist.* 70, to Bishop Possessor.

⁶John II, *epist. olim* 3, to certain Senators.

⁷*Registrum epistolarum*, lib. X, *epist.* 37, to Innocentius, prefect of Africa.

⁸Hadrian I, *epist.* 83, to the Bishops throughout Spain. Cf. letter to King Charles on images, *passim*.

It is a further tribute to the glory of the Bishop of Hippo, that more than once the Fathers in lawful Councils assembled, made use of his very words in defining Catholic truth. In illustration it is enough to cite the Second Council of Orange and the Council of Trent. Yet again, to cast a backward glance at the years of Our own youth, We wish at this point to recall and delightedly to ponder the words in which Our predecessor of immortal memory Leo XIII, after mentioning writers earlier than Augustine, lauded the help afforded by him to Christian philosophy: "But it is Augustine who seems to have borne off the palm from all. Of towering genius and thoroughly versed in sacred and profane knowledge, he waged relentless war on all the errors of his age with matchless faith and equal learning. What part of philosophy did he leave untouched? Nay rather into what part did he not make thorough search, as when he unfolded to the Faithful the deepest mysteries of the Faith or defended them against the mad attacks of foes; or again when, brushing away the false theories of Academics and Manicheans, he laid a sure and solid foundation for human knowledge, or studied in detail the nature and source and causes of the evils which harass mankind?"⁹

Now before penetrating deeper into the study We have set Ourselves, We would note, for the benefit of all, that the lavish praises bestowed on our Saint by the writers of antiquity are to be understood in a proper sense, and not—as some, who do not share the Catholic sense, have thought—as though the weight of Augustine's word were to be set ahead of the very authority of the teaching Church.

Oh, how "God is wonderful in His saints!"¹⁰ In words bursting from the inmost recesses of a grateful and most loving heart, Augustine avowed and ardently extolled in his book of Confessions the Divine mercy in his regard. Obedient to an impulse of Divine Providence, the pious Monica inspired her son in his early childhood with so strong a love of Christ, that he could one day write: "Through Thy mercy, O Lord, this name of my Saviour, Thy Son, had already been drunk in with my mother's milk by my infant heart and profoundly cherished; anything apart from this name, no matter how learned or exquisite or true, could not wholly carry me away."¹¹

⁹Encyclical "Aeterni Patris."

¹¹Confessions, Bk. III, c. 4, n. 8.

¹⁰Ps. lxvii, 36.

In youth, parted from his mother, and a pupil of pagan masters—so was it permitted by the Most High—he lost his early piety, became the unhappy slave of carnal pleasures and was ensnared in the toils of Manicheism, being for nearly nine years an adherent of that sect. God's purpose was, that the destined Doctor of Grace should learn by experience and transmit to later ages how extreme is the weakness and frailty of even the noblest spirit, if it be not made strong in the way of virtue by the safeguard of Christian training and ceaseless application to prayer, especially during youth, when the mind is bewitched more readily by the lure of error and the soul is led astray by the first stirrings of sense. God further permitted his defection, that our Saint might realize in his own life how wretched is the man who tries to fill his heart to satiety with creatures; a truth that he later plainly confessed before the Lord. "For Thou wert ever present with compassionate anger, mingling the bitterness of distaste with all my lawless delights, that I might seek delight without distaste and should fail to find this in aught, save in Thee, O Lord."¹² Did not the Heavenly Father, then, abandon Augustine to his own devices, that Monica might ply Him with tearful entreaties and serve as a type of those mothers, who by their long-suffering and gentleness of temper, by their tireless supplication of the Divine mercy, succeed at length in winning back their sons to virtue? For it was impossible that the son should perish, for whom so many tears were shed.¹³ Our Saint thus writes to the point:

And in those same books containing the story of my conversion, telling how God converted me to the Faith which my unhappy and mad abuse of language was bent on destroying, do you not recall that the purport of my narrative was to show that I was a boon granted to the loyal, daily tears of my mother, lest I be lost?¹⁴

Hence, Augustine was by degrees estranged from the Manichean heresy and, urged as it were by a Divine impulse, was led to Milan to meet Ambrose the Bishop there. The Lord "little by little with a touch of tender pity shaping and moulding his heart,"¹⁵ through the wise words of Ambrose brought him to believe in the Catholic Church and

¹²Confessions, Bk. II, c. 2, n. 4.

¹³*Ibidem*, Bk. III, c. 12, n. 21.

¹⁴*De dono perseverantiae*, c. 20, n. 53.

¹⁵Confessions, Bk. VI, c. 5, n. 7.

in the truth of the Bible. Then it was that the son of Monica, though not yet immune from anxiety and from the allurements of vice, still grasped firmly the truth that Divine Providence has set the way of salvation only in Christ Our Lord and in the Sacred Scriptures, which find the sole warrant of their truth in the authority of the Catholic Church.¹⁶ Yet how hard and toilsome is the complete conversion of a man, who has long been straying from the straight path. He was still the prey of his passions and of mental disquiet, which he was not strong enough to control. So far was he from deriving the strength from the teaching of Platonists concerning God and creatures, that he would have filled the measure of his misfortunes with the still greater one of pride, had he not learned at length from the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, that he who wishes to live like a Christian must build on a foundation of humility and depend on the aid of Divine grace. And now—we narrate a fact the story of which none can tell without tears—grieving over the deeds of his past life and inspired by the example of so many Christians, who were ready to make shipwreck of all created goods to gain the “one thing necessary,” he made his surrender to the Divine mercy, which had lovingly pursued him, at the moment when at prayer he was startled by a sudden voice that cried: “Take and read.” He opened a copy of the Epistles lying near and with Heaven’s grace effectively stirring his soul, the following passage met his eyes: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.”¹⁷ And it is certain that from that moment to his dying breath, Augustine gave himself wholly to God.

It soon became clear what sort of a “vessel of election” the Lord had wrought in Augustine and for what brilliant deeds he was destined. Ordained priest and later advanced to the Bishopric of Hippo, he shed the light of his abundant learning not merely on Christian Africa, but on the entire Church, bestowing the while the blessings of his apostolate. He meditated on the books of Holy Writ, long and earnestly did he offer to the Lord the prayers, whereof the meaning and the accent still live in his writings. That he

¹⁶Confessions, Bk. VII, c. 7, n. 11.

¹⁷*Ibidem*, Bk. VIII, c. 12, n. 29. (Rom. xiii, 13-14.)

might daily better fathom and understand the truths of Divine Revelation, he read through with close scrutiny the works of the Fathers and Doctors who preceded him and whom he regarded with humble veneration. Though he came after those holy men, who like dazzling stars shed luster on the Catholic name—Clement of Rome, for example, and Irenaeus, Hilary and Athanasius, Cyprian and Ambrose, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom; though a contemporary of Jerome, nevertheless Augustine still excites in all men the greatest admiration because of the subtlety and depth of his thoughts and because of the marvelous wisdom breathing from the pages, which through long span of nearly fifty years he wrote and published. It would be too heavy a task to go over the many voluminous compositions which, belonging as they do to every sacred topic—both Biblical exegesis and moral instruction—are so varied that his commentators can with difficulty give a comprehensive survey of them in their entirety. However, may we not from this massive bulk of doctrine select for explicit mention some of his writings, which seem best suited to our age and most helpful to Christian society?

First of all, Augustine made it the object of his strenuous endeavor that all men should thoroughly learn and with conviction what was the chief end of their existence, what was the only way that led to true happiness. Could anyone, we ask, no matter how shallow and frivolous, have heard without being deeply stirred that avowal, made to God by a man who had lived for pleasure so long and was admirably endowed for winning this world's prizes, when he cried: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it rest in Thee"?¹⁸

These words, while stating in sum the whole of wisdom, at the same time fittingly portray God's love for us, the peerless dignity of man, and the unhappy plight of those who live estranged from their Maker. At any rate in these days of ours above all, when the wondrous nature of created things is being daily laid bare with greater clearness, when man's inventive genius is bringing under his sway nature's forces and energies, to make them serve his convenience and wait upon his luxury and pleasure—today,

¹⁸Confessions, Bk. I, c. 1, n. 1.

we repeat, when the creations of art and industry, products of mind or mechanical toil are being multiplied and with incredible speed are carried to every corner of the earth, our spirit, absorbed in creatures, grows too forgetful of its Creator, makes fleeting goods its goal to the neglect of eternal ones, and turns to personal and public harm, aye, to its own ruin, those gifts which it has received from a bountiful God for the purpose of extending the kingdom of Christ and of promoting its own salvation. Now lest we become engrossed in this purely human and civil progress, which is wholly bent on material objects and on the pleasures of sense, we must scan and ponder the principles of Christian wisdom so aptly stated and expounded by the Bishop of Hippo: "God, therefore, the wise Creator and just Disposer of every nature, who placed the mortal race of man at the head of the scale of earthly excellence, bestowed on man certain gifts suited to this life, to wit, temporal peace within the limits of mortal life in the safety, security, and fellowship of humankind, together with all that is necessary for maintaining or regaining this peace; such are the things that fittingly fall within the realm of sense, as light, night, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and all else that serves to nourish, shelter, foster, and embellish the human frame. This He has done on the eminently fair understanding, that the mortal who makes a right use of blessings adapted to human peace, will receive greater and better favors, that is, the peace of immortality and the glory and honor befitting it in eternal life for happiness with God and with the neighbor in God; whereas whoever misuses his gifts, will lose those of time without winning those of eternity."¹⁰

When he addressed himself to discussing the last end appointed for man, he makes haste to lay down the principle that those who wish to arrive thereto will make a fruitless endeavor, unless they submit themselves with docile obedience to the Catholic Church, since it alone is destined by God to enrich souls with the light of virtue, without which one of necessity strays from the right path and is driven headlong to imperiling his eternal salvation. For God in His goodness has by no means suffered men to look for Him with wavering steps and sightless eyes: "That they

¹⁰*De Civitate Dei*, Bk. XIX, c. 13, n. 2.

should seek God, if happily they may feel after Him or find Him."²⁰ Rather banishing the darkness of ignorance, He makes Himself known by Revelation, and summons to the duty of repentance those who are wandering. "And God indeed having winked at the times of this ignorance, now declareth unto men, that all should everywhere do penance."²¹ After God had granted the gift of inspiration to the sacred writers, He entrusted the Bible to the Church, which His Only-begotten Son founded, for its safe-keeping and authentic interpretation. By appealing to the miracles wrought by Christ the Founder, Augustine proved the Divine origin of the Church from its very inception.

The ailing are healed, lepers are cleansed; the lame walk, sight is restored to the blind, hearing to the deaf. The men of that day beheld water changed into wine, 5,000 fed to repletion with five loaves, the sea traversed on foot, the dead rising from the grave. Thus some miracles visibly benefited the body, others by a hidden marvel the soul, all gave testimony of the majesty of the Worker for the good of all. And so God's authority stirred men's errant souls to seek Him.²²

True, miracles declined somewhat in number thereafter. But for this a manifest reason is found in the fact that the Divine testimony was strikingly confirmed as time went on by the marvelous spread of the Faith and by the uplifting of human society to the plane of Christian morality. When trying to bring his friend Honoratus back to the Church, Augustine writes to this effect:

Do you not think that a keen interest for human welfare is shown, not only in this, that many philosophers maintain that neither earth nor fire nor aught else within the range of sense should be worshiped as God—the only path to whom lies through the mind—but in the fact that an untaught multitude of men and women in so many different nations makes profession of its belief in the same truth? Witness an abstinence from food contenting itself with a meagre diet of bread and water, fasts not for a day but continued through many days. Witness a chastity so perfect as to be indifferent to wedlock and offspring, an enduring patience that scorns crucifixion and the stake, a liberality that divides fortunes among the poor, in short, a contempt so intense of everything worldly as even to yearn for death. Not many do these things, fewer are they that do them well and wisely; but whole peoples approve, applaud, favor, aye, love such conduct. Nor is it without a closer approach of the mind to God, not without some spark of virtue, that whole peoples avow themselves too feeble to mount so high. This marvel has Divine Providence wrought by the oracles of the prophets, by the Incarnation and teaching of

²⁰Acts xvii, 27.

²²*De utilitate credendi*, c. 16, n. 34.

²¹Acts xvii, 30.

Christ, by the journeys of the Apostles, by the affronts and crosses and life-blood and death of martyrs, by the saintly lives we boast, and in all this can be discerned miracles suited to the needs of the time and worthy of such achievements and such virtues. Seeing, then, as we do such marked assistance from God, so much progress and fruit, shall we hesitate to nestle in the bosom of that Church which, as the human race confesses, stands a pillar of authority derived from the Apostolic See whereon successive Bishops have sat enthroned, while the rebel cry of heresy has been condemned in part by the popular voice, in part by the judgment of Councils, in part too by the majestic utterance of miracles?²³

No one can gainsay that these words of Augustine, which have lost none of their force and energy since they were written, have been proved beyond cavil in the long lapse of fifteen centuries. As these ages sped, the Church of God, though afflicted by many a disaster and social upheaval, torn by many a heresy and schism, anguished by the treason of her followers and by the disloyalty of her sons, nevertheless, trusting in the promises of her Founder, while human institutions of varying origin that surrounded her fell in ruins, not only stood safe and unharmed, but also in every age glowed with brighter beauty in noble lives of holiness and devotion, while in many Christians she made the fire of charity burn with growing heat. Moreover, thanks to her missionaries and martyrs she brought into her Fold fresh nations, among whom the pristine glory of virginity renews its bloom and the rank of priest and Bishop keeps its vigor. In fine, so deeply has she imbued all peoples with her spirit of charity and justice, that the very men who treat her with indifference or hostility, cannot refrain from borrowing her way of speaking and acting. When our Saint, therefore, in refutation of the Donatists who dared to confine the true Church of Christ within the narrow bounds of a corner of Africa, maintained the universality or "catholicity" of a Church in which all men may find the help and protection of the aids of Divine grace, he rightly closed his reasoning with these solemn words: "The decision is sure in which the world concurs."²⁴ The reading of this phrase, not so very long ago, influenced to such a degree a man of high fame and noble nature, that he did not tarry long in entering the one Fold of Christ.²⁵

Furthermore, Augustine emphatically asserted that this

²³*De utilitate credendi*, c. 17, n. 35.

²⁴*Contra epist. Parmeniani*, Bk. III, n. 24.

²⁵J. H. Newman, "Apologia," pp. 116-117. (London, 1890.)

unity of the universal Church and her absolute inerrancy as a teacher, is derived not only from her invisible Head, Christ Jesus, who from Heaven "rules His body"²⁶ and speaks by the lips of His teaching Church,²⁷ but also from her visible head on earth, the Roman Pontiff, to whom the chair of Peter belongs by the lawful right of succession. For this line of Peter's successors "is that rock against which the haughty gates of hell do not prevail."²⁸ By incontestable right we "are kept within the bosom of the Church by a succession of priests from the chair of Peter the Apostle, to whom our Lord after His resurrection gave the charge of feeding His sheep, down to the episcopate of today."²⁹ Again, when the Pelagian heresy had launched its attack and its adherents were endeavoring by guile and deceit to unsettle the minds and hearts of the Faithful, the Fathers of the Council of Milevum, which with others owed much to the inspiration and leadership of Augustine, submitted to Innocent I for his approval their discussions and the decrees they framed in stating their conclusions. The Pope in reply praised the Bishops because of their zeal for religion and because of their thoroughly loyal spirit towards the Roman Pontiff.

"They know," he wrote, "that from the apostolic fountain-head issue answers to inquirers through all provinces. Particularly when a matter of Faith is in question, I think that our brothers and fellow-bishops should have recourse to Peter alone, namely to the author of the title and rank they hold, even as you, beloved Brethren, have now appealed, because he can give universal aid to all churches through the whole world."³⁰ When Augustine, accordingly, had learned of the Roman Pontiff's condemnation of Pelagius and Caelestius, he uttered the following memorable words in a sermon to the people: "The views of two councils touching this controversy have been transmitted to the Apostolic See, and the answer has been sent back. The case has been settled. God grant that the error be ended likewise."³¹ These words of his, condensed a trifle, have passed

²⁶*Enarrat. in Ps. lvi, n. 1.*

²⁷*Ibidem.*

²⁸*Psalmus contra partem Donati.*

²⁹*Contra epist. Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti, c. 4, n. 5.*

³⁰Innocent to Silvanus, Valentinus, and the rest who took part in the Council of Milevum. *Epist. 182, n. 2* among the Augustinian letters.

³¹*Serm. 131, c. 10, n. 10.*

into a proverb: "Rome has spoken, the cause is finished." Again on another occasion, after citing the decision of Pope Zosimus who put under the ban of his condemnation all Pelagians in all parts of the world, the Saint wrote: "The Catholic doctrine is so ancient and well-grounded, so certain and clear in these words of the Apostolic See, that it would be criminal in a Christian to doubt of this truth."³²

Now the Church has received from her Divine Spouse the treasures of heavenly grace conveyed mainly through the channel of the Sacraments. Hence, every loyal son of that Church, like the good Samaritan, pours oil and wine into the wounds of the sons of Adam, to free the guilty from sin, to strengthen the weak and feeble, to mould the lives of the virtuous nearer to the ideal of holiness. Even granting that some minister of Christ may at times fail in his duty, does it therefore follow that the power was rendered helpless and void of efficacy? Let us listen to the words of the Bishop of Hippo:

I assert [he writes] and we all assert, that the ministers of so great a Judge should be just men. Let the ministers be just, if they will. If, however, they who sit on the chair of Moses refuse to be just, I find my warrant of security in my Master, of whom His Spirit said: "He it is who baptizes."³³

Would that the words of Augustine had been accepted formerly and were accepted today by all those who, like the Donatists, allege the fall of a priest as a reason for rending the seamless garment of Christ and for unhappily abandoning the way of salvation!

We see how our Saint, for all his exalted genius, humbly submitted his judgment to the authority of the Church teaching. He knew that, as long as he did so, he would not swerve a finger's breadth from Catholic doctrine. More than that, in pondering the sentence: "If you believe not, you will not understand,"³⁴ he learned with certainty that a heaven-born light—denied to the proud—serves as a beacon to the minds of those who cling closely to the Faith and meditate the word of God in a mood of prayerful humility. He knew, besides, that it was the duty of priests—whose lips should keep knowledge³⁵—since they are bound to explain and defend aright the truths of Revelation and

³²*Epist.* 190, to Optatus, c. 6, n. 23.

³³*In Johannis Evang.*, tract. 5, n. 15.

³⁴Isaiah vii, 9 (Septuag.).

³⁵Mal. ii, 7.

expound their meaning to the Faithful, to penetrate the truths of Faith to the depths—so far as it is allowed by Divine permission. As a result, inspired by uncreated Wisdom, by prayer and by meditation on the Divine mysteries, he plied his pen to such purpose, as to bequeath to posterity a copious and excellent body of sacred teaching.

No one, Venerable Brethren, can read even cursorily these voluminous works, without seeing how eagerly the Bishop of Hippo applied his spirit to advance in knowledge of God Himself. How true was his recognition of His Maker in the frame and the harmony of the created universe! How efficaciously he wrote and preached that his flock might attain to a like recognition!

Earth's beauty [he wrote] is the voice of the silent earth. You observe and see its beauty, its fertility, its energies. You see how it produces seed, how it often bears what was not sown. By your contemplation you put it to the question. Your scrutiny of the world is a form of questioning. When you have studied it in wonder and scanned it narrowly, when your search has revealed its mighty power, its dazzling beauty, its surpassing excellence, since it could not possess this excellence in itself and of itself, your mind straightway leaps to the thought that it could not have been self-caused, but is the handiwork of the Creator. What you have found in it, is its speech avowing that you should praise the Creator. After you have pondered in its entirety the beauty of this world of ours, does not its very charm with one voice make answer: "I am not my own cause, God is my Maker"?³⁶

Repeatedly he extolled in glowing language his Creator's absolute perfection, beauty, goodness, eternity, immutability, and power. But he ceased not to point out that God is portrayed more truly in thought than in speech, though even thought fails to depict the true nature of His being,³⁷ while the name best suited to the Creator was the one that God revealed to Moses, when he asked by whom he was being sent.³⁸

However, our Saint did not rest content with a study of the Divine Nature with the unaided resources of the human intellect merely. With Holy Writ lighting his way, and guided by the Spirit of Wisdom, he bent the powers of his lofty genius to a study of the greatest of all mysteries, one which so many Fathers who had gone before

³⁶*Enarrat. in Ps. cxliv*, n. 13.

³⁷*De Trinitate*, Bk. VII, c. 4, n. 7.

³⁸*Enarrat. in Ps. ci*, n. 106.

him, with well-nigh infinite perseverance and unexampled enthusiasm had maintained against the wicked assaults of heretics. We mean the adorable Trinity of Father and Son and Holy Ghost in the unity of the Divine Nature. Aided by light from on high, he treated this central, this fundamental truth of the Catholic Faith with such depth and acuteness, that the Doctors who came after him had only to draw from Augustine's contributions their materials. From these they reared a staunch rampart of theological science to repel the missiles vainly aimed in every age by a perverse human reason, that opposed this mystery, the most baffling of all to the mind of man. Let us hear the Bishop and Doctor of Hippo in his own words:

In the Trinity we predicate as distinctive of the several Persons the relations that exist among them, as Father and Son, and Holy Spirit, the Gift of both. For the Father is not the Trinity, nor is the Son the Trinity, nor is the Gift the Trinity. But this distinction of Persons with respect to one another, is not to speak of them in the plural as three (in nature), but as one, namely, the Trinity itself. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God. So too the Father is good, the Son is good, the Holy Ghost is good. Again, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Ghost is almighty. But that does not mean that there are three gods, three good natures, three almighty natures; but one God, who is good, almighty, the Trinity. The same form is to be followed, when there is question not of their relations to one another, but of any attribute shared by each and all in common. For in this way they are described according to their essence. In the Trinity the essence, greatness, goodness, wisdom are without difference, and so of every absolute attribute predicable of a Person in Himself or of the whole Trinity.³⁹

The style here is pithy and elusive. Elsewhere he makes use of well-chosen illustrations to enable us to arrive at some understanding of the mystery. Thus, for example, he dwells on the image of the Trinity reflected in the human soul, when it advances towards holiness; for, being mindful of God, it both thinks of Him and loves Him. In this way we catch a faint glimpse of the manner in which the Word is begotten by the Father, "Who in some sort has spoken in His coeternal Word all that belongs to Him substantially";⁴⁰ as also of the manner in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, for He "breathes into us the mutual love, with which Father and Son love each other."⁴¹

³⁹*De Trinitate*, Bk. VIII, proem., n. 1.

⁴⁰*Ibidem*, Bk. XV, c. 21, n. 40.

⁴¹*Ibidem*, Bk. XV, c. 17, n. 27.

Thereupon Augustine bids us render clearer and more beautiful this image of God within us day by day up to life's close. Then, when God comes, the Divine image already impressed within us "will be made perfect by that vision which will be had after the Judgment face to face, but now avails us as a mirrored semblance in obscurity."⁴²

Again, we can never sufficiently admire the language of the Doctor of Hippo, when he explains the mysteries that attend the clothing of the Only-begotten Son of God with human flesh. He asks us in explicit terms—quoted by St. Leo the Great in his dogmatic epistle to the Emperor Leo:

To recognize the two natures in Christ, that is to say, the Divine, by which He is equal to the Father; the human, by which the Father is greater. But both together are not two beings, for Christ is one; else, God would be a "quaternity," not a Trinity. For as a single human being results from the union of a rational soul and human flesh, so Christ is one, God and man.⁴³

It was a wise resolution of Theodosius the Younger to command that, with every mark of respect, our Saint be summoned to the Council of Ephesus, where the Nestorian heresy was crushed. However, the unexpected death of Augustine stilled that voice of vehemence and power ere it could swell the chorus of the assembled Fathers and utter its anathema against the heresiarch, who had the hardihood to cleave Christ asunder, if we may so speak, and to assail the Divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin.⁴⁴ Nor should we overlook at this point, though it be with briefest mention, the fact that Augustine more than once brought out in clear relief the rank Christ holds as King. This truth He maintained and proposed to the devotion of the Faithful in Our Encyclical "Quas primas," issued at the close of the Sacred Year. We saw fit to incorporate in the liturgy for the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, Lessons selected from the writings of Augustine.

Everyone probably is acquainted with the matchless work *De Civitate Dei*, in which with surpassing skill he traces God's guiding and ruling hand in the march of human history. There he brings as into a single focus the

⁴²*De Trinitate*, Bk. XIV, c. 19, n. 25.

⁴³In *Johannis evang.*, tract. 78, n. 3. Cf. St. Leo's *epist.* 165, *Testimonia*, c. 6.

⁴⁴*Ibidem*; cf. *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychnianorum*, c. 5.

story of the world, availing himself of every aid that an assiduous study of Holy Writ and his knowledge of the culture of that epoch could furnish. In the successive steps that marked the growth of human society, his keen vision discerns and discriminates two cities, which "two loves" had founded, "namely, the earthly City, built by love of self even to contempt of God, the heavenly City, by love of God even to contempt of self."⁴⁵ Babylon is one, Jerusalem the other. The two "are intermingled and hold a mingled course from the beginning of the human race to the end of time."⁴⁶ But the issue of both is not one and the same, since at long last the citizens of Jerusalem will reign with God forever, while the subjects of Babylon in company with demons will eternally expiate their crimes. Accordingly, to the mind of Augustine the history of human society is nothing else than a portrayal of the uninterrupted outpouring of God's love upon us. The heavenly City, of which He is the author, He bears onward through successes and reverses in such wise, that by His command the very madness and wickedness of the earthly City promote its growth, according to the text: "To them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints."⁴⁷ Consequently we must admit that it is foolish and senseless to imagine, as some do, that the dominant power in the course of the ages, should be sought in the mocking jests of blind fortune, or in the grasping ambition of men stronger than their fellows, or in ceaseless efforts of minds and hearts to develop natural forces, to foster the arts, to secure the comforts of this life. The truth rather is that human events serve only to extend the City of God, which means the spread of evangelical truth and the promotion of the salvation of souls, conformably to the hidden but profoundly merciful designs of Him, who "reacheth from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly."⁴⁸ Let us add a word further. Augustine set the mark, or more truly, the fiery brand of his condemnation on the moral infamy of Greek and Roman paganism. And yet yearning for such a religion has been seen to infatuate, even in our day, certain writers, shallow and even licentious, who extol such a cult for its beauty and fitness and attractive-

⁴⁵*De civitate Dei*, Bk. XIV, c. 28.

⁴⁶*Enarrat. in Ps. lxxiv*, n. 2.

⁴⁷*Rom.* viii, 28.

⁴⁸*Wisdom* viii, 1.

ness. Again, knowing thoroughly his contemporaries and their unhappy forgetfulness of God, with a pen at one time caustic, at another indignant, he scored in his pages all the compulsion and folly, all the outrages and lust, introduced into man's life by the demons through the worship of false gods. There can be no salvation in the ideal of the earthly City, as it sets before its eyes a vain picture of completeness and perfection. For scarcely anyone will take such an ideal seriously or, if he does, the prize he wins will be only the satisfaction of empty and fleeting glory.

True, our Saint praises the ancient Romans, who "for the general welfare, the State, that is, and for the national treasure sacrificed their private fortunes, withstood greed, uplifted their country by a noble policy; so far as their laws went, they were innocent of crime and lewdness; these means and aims they took for the right path along which they pressed on in pursuit of honor, power, renown; they had the esteem of nearly all nations; many peoples bowed to their laws and their sway."⁴⁹ However, as he remarks further on, what else did they gain by so much toil and hardship, "than the worthless pinnacle of human glory, which was all the reward they reaped, for which they burned with overmastering ambition, waging wars that set the world aflame?"⁵⁰ Furthermore, the fruit of the happy issue of their efforts and of their very sway itself, which our Creator employs to further the secret designs of His providence, does not fall into the grasp of those only who turn their backs on the heavenly City. For God "enriched the emperor Constantine—not a votary of demons, but a worshiper of the true God—with greater earthly blessings than any man would dare to crave in his dreams."⁵¹ He granted prosperity and victory after victory to Theodosius, who "was happier in being a member of the Church than in wielding an earthly scepter."⁵² Nay, when rebuked by Ambrose for his slaughter of the people of Thessalonica, "his penance was such that the multitude, who prayed for him, was more deeply moved to tears at sight of the imperial majesty abased, than to fear of his rage at their own offenses."⁵³ Now while it is true that no man is refused temporal blessings, be he good or bad, and while misfortunes can overtake

⁴⁹*De civitate Dei*, Bk. V, c. 15. ⁵⁰*Ibidem*, Bk. V, c. 17, n. 2.

⁵¹*Ibidem*, c. 25.

⁵²*Ibidem*, c. 26.

⁵³*Ibidem*, Bk. XV, c. 26.

all, the virtuous as well as the wicked, yet we may not doubt that benefits and adversities are allotted by God for the furtherance of the eternal salvation of souls and for the well-being of the heavenly City. Therefore the leaders and rulers of the nations have received their authority from God for this end, that in the regions subject to them they should—as His associates—lend their efforts to promoting the designs of Divine Providence. Clearly, then, it is their duty to keep their gaze riveted on the supreme end set for man's attainment, and while active for the earthly prosperity of their citizens, to do and command nothing in abatement of the laws of Christian justice and charity, but rather to make it easier for those under them to recognize and pursue the prizes that never fail.

We do not style certain Christian emperors happy [writes the Bishop of Hippo], because their reign was a long one, or because, after dying in peace themselves, their sons succeeded to the throne; nor yet again because they vanquished the State's foreign foes or were able to forestall and crush revolt of seditious citizens against themselves. These and similar favors that enrich or cheer this life of hardship, have been bestowed even on clients of the demons, on men who have no part in the kingdom of God like those of whom we speak. This is a boon of the Divine mercy, to prevent those who believe in God from craving temporal blessings as though they were of highest value. Rather do we term them happy, when they rule justly; when they yield not to pride if men praise them to the skies or offer the tribute of cringing servility, but bear in mind that they are mortal; when they make their power the handmaid of the Divine majesty, to extend as far as possible the worship of God; when they fear, love, adore God; when they cherish more that other kingdom, which they are not afraid to share with others; when they are slow to punish, quick to forgive; when they chastise because constrained thereto in ruling and maintaining the State, and not to sate the hunger of hatred; when they pardon offenses, not that crime may go unpunished, but through hope of the evil-doer's amendment; when they temper whatever severe measures they take by mercy, gentleness, and open-handedness; when they curb passion the more sternly, the freer it might have been; when they think it better to hold sway over unruly desires than over nations of any kind; finally when they do all this not at the bidding of idle ambition, but out of love of eternal happiness; when they fail not to offer the true God in atonement for their sins the sacrifice of humility, forgiveness, and prayer. Christian princes of this type we declare are happy, now in hope, later on in fact, when our expectations shall be fulfilled.⁵⁴

Here indeed is an ideal portrait of a Christian sovereign, nor will you find anywhere a nobler or more perfect one.

⁵⁴*De civitate Dei*, Bk. V, c. 24.

But it cannot be reproduced by the man who trusts the guidance of human wisdom, which often is slow-witted, oftener blinded by the emotions. The task is possible only for him, who, docile to the teaching of the Gospel, has come to learn that he cannot rule the State conformably to the Divine plan, that is, with good and happy issue, if he be not penetrated to the marrow with the spirit of justice joined with charity and humility. "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and they that have power over them are called beneficent. But you not so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serveth."⁵⁵ Hence all those are pitifully deluded, whose theory of government makes no account of man's last and highest end, of the right use of the goods of this life. Others too in goodly number are in error, who hold that the laws of statecraft and of human progress cannot be made to square with the precept of Him who proclaimed: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."⁵⁶ We mean the precepts of Christ Jesus, who has provided and strengthened His Church with a superb, an immortal constitution which so many vicissitudes of time and fortune, so many tribulations during the twenty centuries that have passed have been unable to shake, and will never cause to totter even to the day of doom. Why, then, do the rulers, who have at heart the good and welfare of their citizens, hamper the action of the Church? Ought they not rather give her their support, as far as circumstances permit? The State need not fear that the Church will trench on the domain of its aims and its rights. Indeed Christ's followers, obedient to Him who gave them their name, have from the beginning held State rights in loyal reverence; so much so that, when victims of persecution and stripes, they could say with good warrant: "Princes have persecuted me without cause."⁵⁷ On this matter Augustine writes in his wonted masterly fashion:

What harm had Christians done to the kingdoms of earth? Did their King forbid His soldiers to pay the tribute and yield the loyalty that are due to earthly kings? When the Jews were scheming to slander Him on this score, did He not tell them: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"? Did He not in person pay the tribute coin, taken from the mouth of a fish? When soldiers serving an earthly prince asked His Precursor

⁵⁵Luke xxii, 25-26.

⁵⁶Luke xxi, 33.

⁵⁷Ps. cxviii, 161.

what they should do to win eternal salvation, his answer was not: "Discard your uniform, cast your arms aside, abandon your king to take service under the Lord," but rather: "Do violence to no man, neither calumniate any man, and be content with your pay" (Luke iii, 14). Did not one of His lieutenants and a beloved comrade say to his fellow-soldiers, to Christ's liegemen, so to speak: "Let every soul be subject to higher powers" (Rom. xiii, 1)? Further on he adds: "Render therefore to all men their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due: custom, to whom custom: fear, to whom fear: honor, to whom honor. Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (Rom. xiii, 7-8). Did not the Church enjoin prayer for sovereigns? In what, then, have Christians displeased them? What debt have they failed to pay? Wherein have Christians lacked submissiveness to earthly kings? Consequently, earthly kings have persecuted the Christians without cause.⁵⁸

Surely no more is to be demanded of Christ's disciples, than that they obey the just laws of the nation, provided, of course, it does not command what the law of Christ forbids, or forbid what the law of Christ commands, thus causing a severance between Church and State. Hence, it is hardly worth while to affirm a truth, that We think Our words have made sufficiently clear, namely, so far is the Church from harming the State, that it rather contributes generously to the help and profit of the State. On this topic there is no need of repeating here those golden words of the Bishop of Hippo, quoted by Us in Our recent Encyclical on "The Christian Education of Youth"; nor those others, equally persuasive, which Our immediate predecessor of happy memory, Benedict XV, cited in his Encyclical "Pacem Dei munus," for the purpose of bringing into clear relief the fact, that the Church has striven ceaselessly to weld the nations together by Christian law, and has furthered every plan for securing to mankind the fruits of justice, charity, and universal peace, that the peoples of the world would make their goal that "unity which is the patroness of prosperity and renown."

However, our Saint in his delineation of the workings of Providence, did not rest satisfied with setting forth in a general way all that might relate to Church and State. He goes further. His keen mind analyzes and surveys how the grace of God, by an inward and hidden action, moves the human mind and will. The efficacy of this Divine grace, he had himself experienced, when he saw vanish the darkness

⁵⁸*Enarr. in Ps. cxviii, sermo 31, n. 1.*

of doubt in the sudden change of mind he so wonderfully underwent at Milan.

How sweet it became for me of a sudden [he writes] to lack the sweetness of vain pleasures! It was now a joy to renounce what I had dreaded losing. Thou, sweetness true and perfect, didst set me free from them. As Thou wast ridding my heart of them, so didst Thou enter in their stead, more delightful than any pleasure—though not to flesh and blood; brighter than any light, but deeper than any secret; loftier than any honor, but not to men lofty in their own conceit.⁵⁹

Meanwhile the Bishop of Hippo found a master and a guide in Holy Writ, especially in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, who also in his time had been miraculously converted to follow Christ. He allied himself with the teaching handed down by holy men, and with the Catholic sense of the Faithful. Day by day he was impelled to attack more vigorously the Pelagians, who stubbornly maintained that the Redemption of man by Christ Jesus was wholly without effect. Finally, by a Divine impulse, he carried over many years his study of the ruin of the human race after the sin of our first parents, of the relation between the grace of God and free will, and of what goes by the name of predestination. So closely did he study the subject and with such happy results, that he was deemed the Doctor of Grace and was so entitled. He led the way for all other Catholic writers of later ages, to whom he reached a helping and a restraining hand, lest in their discussion of these intricate problems they err one way or the other: either by teaching that free will in man, once his original justice was lost, is but a name and no more, as the early Protestants and the Jansenists held; or that Divine grace was not a free gift and was not all-powerful, as the Pelagians kept repeating. Some helpful suggestions might be introduced here, on which the men of our day could reflect with marked advantage. It is abundantly clear that readers of Augustine will not be caught in the toils of that pernicious error, which was widespread during the eighteenth century, namely, that the inborn impulses of the will should neither be feared nor curbed, since all of them are right and sound. From this false principle sprang those educational methods, which We condemned not long ago in Our Encyclical on "The Christian Education of Youth." Their effect is to allow a free mingling of the

⁵⁹Confessions, Bk. IX, c. 1, n. 1.

sexes, and to employ no precaution in controlling the growing passions of boyhood and youth. From this false principle too comes that license in writing and reading, in presenting or frequenting plays, that do not merely threaten innocence and purity with dangerous occasions, but actually plot their ruin and destruction. From this source again are derived those immodest fashions of dress, which Christian women can never be at too great pains to abolish.

Now our Saint teaches that, ever since our first parents sinned, man has lost the perfection with which he was created; for when he possessed it, he was borne easily and smoothly along the path of virtuous conduct. On the contrary, in the present condition of our mortal life, he must resist evil and master the desires that lead and lure him astray in the way described by the Apostle: "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members."⁶⁰ On this point, Augustine thus beautifully speaks to his flock:

As long as we live here below, brethren, this holds true; yes, even we who have reached old age in this warfare, though our enemies are less fierce, still have foes to combat. Our enemies have grown wearied after a fashion, by the very passage of time; still, wearied though they are, they continue to harass the peace of our declining years by assaults of one kind or another. The young have a fiercer struggle; one we are acquainted with, through which we have passed. . . . For as long as you bear about a mortal body, sin fights against you; only let it not rule in you. What do I mean by "let it not rule"? I mean by obeying its desires. Once you begin to obey, sin reigns. And what else is this obedience than to yield your members up to sin to serve iniquity . . . ? Do not yield your members to sin to serve iniquity. God has given you through His Spirit power to keep your members in subjection. Passion rises in revolt: keep you the mastery over your members. What does the rebel aim at doing? Keep the mastery over your members; yield them not to sin to serve iniquity; do not give your adversary the weapons with which to fight you. Let not your feet wander to what is unlawful. Passion rebels: guard your members. Keep your hands free of every crime. Restrain your eyes from evil glances. Stop your ears, lest they willingly listen to lewd speech. Keep watch over the whole body, the whole frame, the noblest, the humblest parts. What can passion do? It knows how to rebel, but not how to conquer. Frequent and fruitless rebellion teaches it not to rebel.⁶¹

If only we encase ourselves in the armor of salvation against such a conflict, once we begin to refrain from sin-

⁶⁰Rom. vii, 23.

⁶¹Serm. 128, cc. 9-10, nn. 11-12.

ning, we shall little by little blunt the edge of the enemy's attack and sap his strength; until at length we shall wing our flight to that place of repose, where triumph and boundless joy will be ours. The credit of the victory is to be ascribed solely to the grace of God, which within us gives light to the mind and strength to the will, when we rise superior to so many hindrances and contests. It is the grace of God, We say. For as He created us, so is He able, through the treasures of His wisdom and power, to set aflame and fill our hearts wholly with His love. Hence, the Church, which from the fountains of the Sacraments turns the stream of grace into our souls, is rightly entitled holy. For by her tireless, ceaseless influence she unites countless souls with God in the close bond of a friendship, in which they abide. What is more, many of these souls she guides and leads to an invincible fortitude, to perfect sanctity of life, to deeds of heroism. Why, is there not a growth year by year in the number of her martyrs, virgins, confessors, whom she holds up to her children for their admiration and imitation? Are not they so many fair flowers of staunch virtue, of chastity and charity, transplanted by Divine grace from earth to heaven? To stay and wither in their native sickly state, is the lot only of those, who resist the Divine invitation and refuse to make a right use of their liberty. Again, the grace of God encourages us never to despair of anyone's salvation while he lives, as well as to look hopefully for a daily increase of charity in all men. In the same grace is laid the foundation of humility and lowliness. For no matter how lofty a man's perfection, he cannot fail to remember the words: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"⁶² How, again, can such a man help turning with gratitude to Him, who "has put it within the reach of weaklings to will invincibly by His gift what is good, and invincibly to refuse to forfeit the good."⁶³

Christ Jesus, our kind Master, inspires us to implore the gifts of His grace, when He says: "Ask, and it shall be given to you: Seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that

⁶²I Cor. iv, 7.

⁶³*De correptione et gratia*, c. 12, n. 38.

knocketh, it shall be opened."⁶⁴ The very gift of perseverance "can be won by humble petition."⁶⁵ For that reason, public and private prayer never fails in God's churches.

When have prayers not been offered in the Church, to obtain the gift of faith for infidels and for her enemies? What believer, whose friend or neighbor or wife was an unbeliever, did not entreat of the Lord a mind docile to the Christian Faith for the loved one? Was there ever anyone, who did not beg for himself the grace of persevering in God's favor?⁶⁶

Therefore, Venerable Brethren, offer supplication to God, and let your clergy and people join in your supplication—under the patronage of the Doctor of Grace—in behalf of those especially who are either strangers to the Catholic Faith or have strayed from the truth. Moreover, spare no pains in giving an exemplary training to those who seem to have a vocation to the priesthood, for they are destined—agreeably to their office—to be the dispensers of Divine grace.

Possidius, the first to write the life of Augustine, declared that to a far greater degree than the readers of his works, the Saint

profited those who could see and hear him preaching in his church and were familiar with his dealings with men. Not only was he "a scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old," not only a merchant who sold all he had to buy the precious pearl he found, but he was of the number of those to whom were directed the words: "Thus speak ye, thus do ye"—one of those of whom our Saviour says: "He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."⁶⁷

For to begin with the queen of all the virtues, our Saint, leaving all else aside, made the love of God so completely the goal of his desires and efforts, and fed its flame so steadfastly in his soul, that he is fittingly portrayed as holding in his hand a burning heart. No one, who has even once turned the pages of the "Confessions," can forget the conversation between mother and son, at the window of the house in Ostia. The narrative, with its lifelike charm, makes us feel that we see Augustine and Monica there, side by side, absorbed in the contemplation of heavenly things. He writes:

⁶⁴Matt. vii. 7-8.

⁶⁶*Ibidem.* c. 23, n. 63.

⁶⁵*De dono perseverantiae*, c. 6, n. 10.

⁶⁷*Vita S. Augustini.* c. 31.

Alone together we held most sweet converse. Forgetting the things that lay behind and stretching out to those that were before, we questioned each other, in the presence of Truth, which Thou art, about the nature of the eternal life of the Saints, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man to conceive. Mentally with parted lips we hung over the supernal rills of Thy fountain—the fountain of life with Thee—if haply we might be refreshed, so far as our condition would allow, and in some sort ponder so profound a mystery. . . . And while we conversed with eager longing, with the heart's supreme effort we made some approach thereto. We sighed and there left fettered the firstlings of the spirit, then to return to the sound of our voices, where the word begins and ends. Yet what bears any likeness to Thy Word, who is our Lord, who abides within Himself and ages not, who makes all things new?⁶⁸

We must not imagine that it was an exceptional thing for Augustine thus to lift mind and heart above the life of the body. Any time he could spare from his daily duties and tasks, he devoted to meditation on the Sacred Scriptures he knew so well, that he might draw thence the relish and the light of truth. Rising on thought's pinions from a consideration of the works and mysteries that reveal God's surpassing love for us, he was borne aloft little by little to the Divine perfections themselves, into which he plunged—if we may so speak—as deeply as the heavenly grace given him allowed.

Often I do this [he says, sharing with us his secret], this is my delight, and withdrawing from such activity as necessity imposes, I take refuge in this kind of pleasure. In all the things traversed by my mind, while I confer with Thee, I find no safe place for my soul except in Thee. In Thee are linked in unison my wandering strains. From Thee may nothing of mine depart. Sometimes, too, Thou dost admit me to a deep and unwonted interior emotion, to an indescribable sweetness. If that be brought to its perfection within me, I know of nothing which that life will not contain.⁶⁹

Hence it was that he cried: "Too late have I loved Thee, O beauty so ancient, yet so new! Too late have I loved Thee!"⁷⁰

Again, how lovingly he contemplated the life of Christ, striving to reproduce an ever more perfect image of it in himself and to repay love with love. In his counsel to virgins, he impressed on them the same lesson: "Let Him be fixed deep in your heart, who for you was fastened to the cross."⁷¹ As his love of God burned with a more ardent

⁶⁸Confessions, Bk. IX, c. 10, nn. 23-24.

⁶⁹*Ibidem*, Bk. X, c. 40, n. 65.

⁷¹*De sancta virginitate*, c. 55, n. 56.

⁷⁰*Ibidem*, c. 27, n. 38.

flame as days went on, so too did he make incredible progress in the rest of the virtues. No one can refuse his admiration to a man—whom all venerated, extolled, consulted, hearkened to for his lofty genius and sanctity—both in his writings destined for publication and in his letters, making it his great concern not only to refer to the Author of all good the praise offered himself, as being due to God alone, and to encourage and praise others, as far as truth allowed, but also to lavish honor and reverence on his colleagues in the episcopate. These were especially his mighty forerunners, such as Cyprian and Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary and John Chrysostom, Ambrose—his master in the Faith—whom he revered as a father and whose teaching and life he was wont to recall. But especially there shone with luster in our Saint the love of souls, a love inseparable from love of God, of those souls particularly who were committed to his pastoral care.

From the day when—under Divine guidance—through the favor of Bishop Valerius and the popular choice, he was first ordained priest and then raised to the See of Hippo, he became wholly engrossed in the task of nourishing his flock with the food of sound doctrine, of defending it from prowling wolves, of leading it to a happy eternity. With a courage that was combined with charity towards men in error, he fought against heresy. He took measures to protect his people against the wiles employed at the time by Manicheans, Donatists, Pelagians, and Arians. In his refutation of these heretics themselves, he not only checked the spread of false doctrine and recovered lost spoil, but even brought back his opponents to the Catholic Faith. To this end he was always equipped for controversy, even in public, for he trusted implicitly in the Divine aid, in the innate strength and efficacy of truth, and in the loyalty of his people. If any heretical writings came to his hands, he lost no time in refuting them one after the other. He was neither daunted nor worsted by the senselessness of error, by the pricks of controversy, by the stubbornness and unfairness of adversaries. Yet all the while, no matter how spiritedly he battled for the truth, never for a moment did he cease to implore from God the conversion of his foes, whom he cherished with the kindliness of Christian charity. His writings reveal with what humility and persuasiveness he addressed them:

Let those be angry with you, who know not how hard a task it is to find the truth and to keep clear of error. Let those be angry with you, who know not how exceptional and difficult it is, to subdue imaginations of the flesh by the serenity of a pious mind. . . . Finally, let those be angry with you, who have never been misled by the error, which they see has misled you. But I, after being for a long time storm-tossed, could turn my gaze on that clear truth which tells its story with no admixture of falsehood. . . . Those fictions, in short, which from long use hold you entangled in their coils, I once studied closely, listened to eagerly, believed heedlessly, urged insistently on all I could, maintained against others stubbornly and vigorously. Hence I can by no means be angry with you, for as I had to bear with myself in those days, so now must I bear with you and treat you with all the patience my friends showed me, when I blindly and madly groped in the darkness of your tenets.⁷²

Consequently, hope could not fail, a happy issue was assured to the zeal for religion of the Bishop of Hippo, to his tireless activity and gentleness of soul. The Manicheans were brought to Christ's Fold, the schism of Donatus was ended, the Pelagians were routed on every side. Hence, after the death of Augustine, Possidius could write of him:

This distinguished man, a most important member of the body of the Lord, was keenly alert in his concern for the welfare of the universal Church. Even in this life it was permitted him by the favor of God to rejoice over the fruit of his labors. This was true first in the church of Hippo and its territory, where his jurisdiction chiefly lay, with its complete harmony and peace. Besides, in other parts of Africa he saw the rise and growth of Our Lord's Church, either through his own efforts or through the efforts of others—of the priests he had ordained. He saw with joy Manicheans, Donatists, Pelagians, and pagans abandon their errors in great part and joined to the bosom of the Church. Then too he seconded and applauded the progress and zeal of all good men. The insubordination of his brethren he bore in a spirit of pious and holy tolerance. He mourned the abominations of the wicked, both within and without the Church; cheered, as I said, by the gain and saddened by the loss of the cause of the Lord.⁷³

As our Saint displayed a courageous, an invincible spirit in the weighty interests of Africa or of the entire Church, so he excelled as a zealous and loving father of his flock. It was his practice to preach often to the people. At times he explained passages taken as a rule from the Psalms, from the Gospel of St. John, from the Epistles of St. Paul, suiting himself to the capacity of the simpler and less intelligent of his hearers. At times he rebuked—and most fruitfully—any abuses or faults that might have crept in among the

⁷²*Contra epist. Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, cc. 2-3, nn. 2-3.

⁷³*Vita S. Augustini*, c. 18.

people of Hippo. In this function he toiled long and earnestly to win sinners back to God, to succor the poor, to plead the cause of the accused. Moreover, though he complained that this distracted and divided his mind, he endeavored to allay strife and litigation about secular matters among Christians, letting the exercise of episcopal charity win the day over his distaste for the world. His charity and courage shone with brightest luster amid the wreck of civilization, when the Vandals laid waste Africa, sparing neither priestly rank nor sacred temple. Some Bishops and priests were at a loss what course to pursue in the midst of so many crushing disasters. One of them asked Augustine his opinion, and the holy old man frankly wrote back, that it was not permissible for any priest, whose ministry was necessary to the Faithful, to leave his people, no matter what threatened.

Surely we know [he said] that when such perils reach their crest and no escape is possible, people of both sexes and of all ages are wont to flock to the church. Some beg for Baptism, some for reconciliation, some for the performance of penance, all for consolation and for the Sacraments to be made available and administered. In such a crisis, if ministers be lacking, utter ruin is the lot of those who leave this world unregenerate or unshriven. How extreme is the grief of their brethren in the Faith, who cannot share with them the repose of eternal life! How piercing the lamentation of all, aye, and the bitter denunciation of some at the absence of sacred ministries and ministers! Consider what the fear of temporal evils does, and the eternal evils it entails. Whereas, if ministers be present, with the strength and means God gives them, succor is ready for all. Some are baptized, others are reconciled, none are robbed of Communion of the Body of the Lord; all are consoled, are edified, are exhorted to invoke the aid of God, who can avert whatever misfortune is feared. All are ready for either issue, so that, if that chalice may not pass from them, His will may be done who cannot will anything that is evil.⁷⁴

He concludes in these terms: "If, however, anyone flees, so that the flock of Christ is deprived of the food by which it is nourished spiritually, that man is a hireling, who sees the wolf coming and flies, since he has no care for the sheep."⁷⁵ What is more, our Saint practised what he preached. For in the city which was his episcopal see, while the barbarians were besieging it, the great-souled shepherd who stayed with his flock, yielded up his soul to God.

Another fact may be now added to complete Our eulogy of Augustine. History avouches that this holy Doctor of

⁷⁴*Epist.* 228, n. 8.

⁷⁵*Epist.* 228, n. 14.

the Church had seen at Milan, "outside the city walls under the fostering care of Ambrose,"⁷⁶ a dwelling-place of holy souls. Again, a little after his mother's death, he knew of monasteries "at Rome also in large number . . . not merely for men, but for women likewise."⁷⁷ Scarcely then had he landed on the shores of Africa, when he began to plan the progress of souls towards absolute perfection of life in the Religious state, and built a monastery in an estate of his. Here "he established himself for nearly three years, set himself free from all worldly cares, and with certain followers who attached themselves to him lived only for God, in the practice of fasting, prayer, and good works, meditating on the law of the Lord day and night."⁷⁸ After his promotion to the priesthood, he founded another monastery at Hippo in the neighborhood of the church; "and began to live with the servants of God according to the manner and rule fixed under the holy Apostles: so that before all else no one in that society kept anything of his own, but they held all things in common, giving to each whatever he needed."⁷⁹ When he was raised to the episcopal dignity, since he was unwilling to sacrifice the blessings of community life himself, yet would not throw open his monastery to all who came as visitors or guests of the Bishop of Hippo, he established a community of clerics in the episcopal palace. He required that, after renouncing their family property, they should live in common a life which, while remote from the allurements of the world and from anything like luxury, would not be over-harsh or austere. The inmates too were to fulfil unitedly the duties imposed by the love of God and of the neighbor.

Not far away was a group of Religious women under the superiority of his own sister. To these he gave an admirable rule, characterized at once by its wisdom and its moderation. This rule is followed today by a goodly number of religious congregations of both sexes, not only those who are called "Augustinians," but others whose founders have added their individual constitutions to the original rule. These were the seeds of a more perfect life in harmony with the evangelical counsels, which our Saint sowed

⁷⁶Confessions, Bk. VIII, c. 6, n. 15.

⁷⁷*De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, Bk. I, c. 33, n. 70.

⁷⁸Possidius, *Vita S. Augustini*, c. 3.

⁷⁹*Ibidem*, c. 5.

among his contemporaries, and rendered a service not to Christian Africa alone, but to the universal Church; for it is from this spiritual militia that the Church has drawn during past centuries, and draws today, marked advantages and growth. Rich harvests of this sort sprang from the fruitful sowing of Augustine, even in the Saint's life-time. Thus Possidius relates that, appealed to from every quarter, the Father and lawgiver permitted many Religious men to sally forth in all directions, in order that they might found new monasteries—as one fire kindles another—and might aid the churches of Africa by their learning and holiness of life.

Hence, our Saint could rejoice in this robust activity of Religious life, so fully meeting his desires. We may quote his own words:

I, the writer of these lines, loved intensely the perfection our Lord spoke of, when He said to the rich young man: "Go, sell all you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have a treasure in heaven, and come follow me." This I did, not of my strength, but with the help of His grace. Nor is my credit the less, because I was not a rich man. Neither were the Apostles rich men, who were the first to do this. He gives up the whole world, who gives up all he has and all he desires to have. As to the progress I have made along this road of perfection, I know better than any other man; but God knows better than I. To pursue this aim I urge others as best I can, and in the Lord's name I am not without compeers, who have been won over by my means.⁸⁰

In our day likewise We would like to see men arise all the world over, resembling the holy Doctor, many "sowers of chaste counsel," who prudently, of course, but fearlessly and perseveringly, under God's guidance would persuade others to adopt the Religious and priestly life. So would be provided a surer safeguard against the decline of the Christian spirit and the gradual decay of sound morality.

We have sketched the career and the deserts of our subject, Venerable Brethren; a man to whom none or very few can be compared from among those who have flourished from history's dawn to the present, if we regard his soaring and subtle genius, his wealth and range of learning, his sanctity mounting to the topmost pinnacle, his invincible defense of Catholic truth. We have already cited more than one who spoke his praises. How charmingly, and how truly, Jerome writes to his contemporary and close friend: "My resolution is to love, to welcome, to cherish, to admire

⁸⁰*Epist.* 157, c. 4, n. 39.

you, and to champion your words as though they were my own.⁷⁸¹ And again: "Well done! You are famous throughout the world. Catholics revere and receive you as another builder of the ancient Faith. A mark of greater glory it is, that heretics loathe you. Me too they assail with a like hatred. They would kill in desire those whom they cannot slay with the sword."⁷⁸²

Therefore, Venerable Brethren, as We have most gladly commemorated the Saint in this Encyclical, not long before the expiration of the year that marks the fifteenth century since his death, so We have it very much at heart that you would so extol his memory among your people, that everyone may venerate him, everyone—before all else—may strive to imitate him, everyone may render thanks to God for the benefits which have come to the Church through so great a Doctor. In this We know that Augustine's noble sons—as is befitting—will take the lead. The ashes of their Father and Founder, given them through the kind grant of Leo XIII, Our predecessor of happy memory, they piously preserve at Pavia in the Church of St. Peter in *Caelo Aurco*. May the Faithful flock in crowds to that shrine, to honor his sacred remains and to gain the indulgences We have bestowed. Then too We feel constrained to declare Our lively hope and desire that the Eucharistic Congress of the whole world, soon to be held at Carthage, besides contributing to the triumph of Christ Jesus hidden under the Sacramental Species, may also redound to the honor of Augustine. For since the Congress will meet in the city where our Saint once vanquished the heretics and strengthened the Christians in their faith; in Latin Africa, whose ancient glories time will never wither, which was the birthplace of that mind of surpassing wisdom; not far either from Hippo, which had the happy fortune of witnessing his virtues and profiting by his pastoral care; it must surely come to pass that the memory of the holy Doctor and his teaching about the august Sacrament—which We have omitted as being somewhat familiar to most readers from the Church's liturgy—will present itself to the minds of those that assemble there, nay, will almost greet their gaze.

Finally, We exhort all the Christian Faithful, and es-

⁸¹*Epist.* 172, n. 1, among the Augustinian letters.

⁸²*Epist.* 195, among the Augustinian letters.

pecially those who propose to visit Carthage, to make Augustine their intercessor with the Divine clemency, that brighter days may dawn hereafter upon the Church. Let them pray, too, that in the vast regions of Africa, natives and strangers—whether they are as yet ignorant of Catholic truth or are at variance with Us—may not spurn the light of the Gospel teaching brought to them by Our missionaries, may not defer to seek shelter in the bosom of their loving Mother, the Church.

May the Apostolic Benediction, which We most lovingly bestow in the Lord on you, Venerable Brethren, and on all your clergy and people, win the bestowal of heavenly gifts and attest Our fatherly affection.

Given at Rome in St. Peter's, the twentieth day of April, on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 1930, the ninth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS PP. XI.

The Boyhood of St. Augustine

An editorial note reprinted from the Sower, July-August, 1930.

AT a time when we are celebrating the memory of the great Saint of Hippo, the story of his boyhood makes piquant reading. It is well for us to realize that a man who in later life wrote monumental works, packed with sublime teaching and solid learning, loathed his books as a boy. The idle, irresponsible boy grew into the greatest Father of the Church. The thought should hearten all teachers who find the weariness of their work creeping over them. We never know the possibilities of the seed we scatter almost at random.

But while the thought of what the idle boy grew up to be is an inspiring one, the revelation of the bitter remembrance of his boyhood is disturbing. Yet the experience is common. It is surprising how frequently one hears men well advanced in years speaking with similar bitterness of the punishments they endured in childhood. A punishment casually inflicted by a teacher will sear a boy's soul to his dying day, especially, of course, if unduly severe or unjustly delivered. It is to the credit of modern pedagogy that a lot of the horror which schoolboys throughout history have endured is being swept out of school life. . . .